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## College student Mallory Mitchell on directing 'Ugly Duckling'

by **Kellie Hwang** - Aug. 18, 2009 02:33 PM  
The Arizona Republic

For many college kids, summer is a time to relax, go home or travel. But Mallory Mitchell had another mission when she returned home.

### 'Ugly Duckling'

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 1 and 3 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Aug. 21-Sept. 20.

**Where:** Desert Stages [Theatre](#), 4720 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale.

**Admission:** \$12-\$15

**Details:** 480-483-1664, [desertstages.com](#).

The 19-year old Phoenix resident is about to start her second year at Occidental College in Los Angeles, majoring in French and in diplomacy and world affairs. She decided to come home to direct Desert Stages Theatre's beloved children's production, "The Ugly Duckling," a play she first was in when she was 10 years old.

The play is Gerry Cullity's adaptation of the classic Hans Christian Andersen [fairy tale](#). Cullity, one of Desert Stages' founders, passed away in 2005, so taking on the directing role had even more meaning for Mitchell.

Mitchell started [theater](#) when she was 8, and has continued to perform at Desert Stages, slowly working her way up to directing. Although she isn't involved in theater at college, she said it has been instrumental helping her mature and develop many skills.

### What is it like being a director when you're so young?

The first show I directed, I was 16 years old and there were [actors](#) in the production that were my own age. That was a little weird at first to lead my peers, but now it's just second nature.

### Why did you decide to return just to direct the play?

I loved the show that Gerry (Cullity) created, I love all of his shows, and I had been in "The Ugly Duckling" twice before. When they gave me the opportunity to direct it, it gave me a chance to reconnect with the community, to see everyone and keep spreading Gerry's message.

### Why do you think that young people should get involved in the arts?

Kids learn public-speaking skills and obviously technical skills like dancing and acting. They gain so much confidence. A lot of people kind of like me were really shy before they came (to Desert Stages), and theater pulls you out. You have so many friends here, and it goes into your everyday life.

### What lifelong skills do you think young people gain from theater?

It teaches kids responsibility. Everyone has their own responsibility in a play. It's not like doing the same drill at a sports practice. Everyone has their own lines to sing, to remember where their spots are and you are responsible for yourself. . . . I learned a lot from doing theater and being an actor, but even more so from leading and directing. It helped me with my leadership skills and speaking in front of adults.

### Do you think theater is more popular today, especially with popular productions like "High School Musical"?

It's definitely a turning point, and more people are aware of theater. I've seen an increased number of auditions who keep coming back show after show because of the mainstream media.

### What do you have to say for parents that are hesitant about letting their kids get involved?

It's a time commitment. The youngest actors meet twice a week and there are shows on weekends. But you will see from even the first rehearsal the confidence change. I think kids should try it out and see what it's like. And it's not only the kids; the parents get so involved, too. Theater moms and dads, they all get together, too. It's building a community.